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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS KABUL 000156

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS CAMP, SCA/A, PRM  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
NSC FOR JWOOD  
OSD FOR SHIVERS  
CG CJTF-82, POLAD, JICCENT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Iran Suspends Deportations In Face Of Strong Afghan  
Government Protests

Ref: Kabul 97

1. (SBU) Iran has suspended its deportation of Afghans after the Afghan government protested in the media and summoned the Iranian charge d'affaires twice to demand a halt to the mid-winter expulsions. In the first two weeks of January, Iran deported more than 9,000 Afghans, who were forced over the border into the worst weather that western Afghanistan has seen in many years. While most deportees are single men working illegally in Iran and not normally considered "vulnerable" by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the extreme weather conditions prompted UNHCR to provide humanitarian assistance and transportation from the Islam Qala border to Herat City. The Afghan Red Crescent and U.S. Forward Operating Base Camp Stone, working with the Afghan National Army, also provided blankets and transportation to deportees facing potentially lethal conditions at the border.

(2) (SBU) At UNHCR's urging, the Afghan government has been increasingly vocal about Iran's harsh deportation policy. Iran deported 365,000 unregistered Afghans in 2007 and recently announced it would incarcerate unregistered Afghans (Ref A). As heavy snow caused many human and livestock fatalities in the Herat region, a January 9 Kabul Times article quoted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman as saying the MFA had discussed the issue with the Iranian charge d'affaires and sent a letter expressing concern. The media continued to cover the daily deportations, and on January 16, the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Kabi Farahi again summoned the Iranian charge, reportedly calling the deportations a "human tragedy." The Afghan government's outspokenness contrasts with its relatively passive stance in spring 2007, despite international protests against the deportation surge. The government's lack of response led to the parliament passing no confidence votes against the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Refugees and Repatriation.

3. (SBU) Department of Refugees and Repatriation officials in Herat confirmed Radio Azadi reports on the afternoon of January 16 that Iran indeed suspended the deportations. The Afghan MFA has not yet been officially informed, and no details are available as to how long the suspension will last. The Afghan-Iran-UNHCR Tripartite Commission meets in late January in Kabul, where Afghan and UNHCR will undoubtedly argue for suspension until warmer weather arrives in March. UNHCR is likely to encourage the Afghans and the new Minister for Refugees and Repatriation to continue to take a strong

stance on deportations in these and future negotiations.

WOOD